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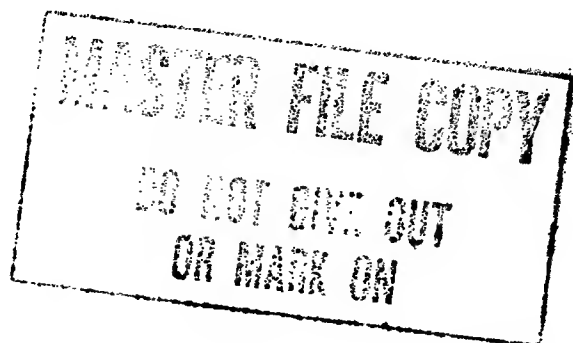Intelligence**

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Tribalism and Regionalism in West Africa: The Liberian Case

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A Research Paper

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Tribalism and Regionalism in West Africa: The Liberian Case

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A Research Paper

This paper was prepared by   25X1
                    Office of Global Issues. It was   25X1
coordinated with the Directorate of Operations   25X1

Comments and queries are welcome and may be
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Tribalism and Regionalism in West Africa: The Liberian Case

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Key Judgments

Information available as of 27 June 1984 was used in this report.

The peoples of West Africa comprise a vast number of tribes; during precolonial times some of these were organized politically, but most were simply social units with little or no administrative authority. Regrouped into colonies (and the independent state of Liberia), West Africans of diverse ethnic origins fell under the rule of a score of governments. Today, with all of the states of the region independent, many precolonial traditions and ties remain strong and represent a potential source of national divisiveness:

- We detect a growing potential for a resurgence of tribalism and regionalism in West Africa and believe that these factors could affect the stability of several states, including Liberia, in which the United States has a special interest.

- In our judgment, the removal of the ban on political activity in Liberia scheduled for July 1984 is likely to be followed by rising tensions along tribal and regional lines.

- Tribalism provides fracture lines along which the poorly disciplined Liberian military might cleave if the electoral process is aborted or if ethnic issues are highlighted in a political campaign.

- Ethnic and regional rivalries are most likely to develop between the Krahn—now dominant under Head of State Doe—and other groups of the interior of Liberia, which historically have been excluded from political participation.

- The power of formerly dominant Americo-Liberians has been sharply curtailed, but their former near monopoly of educational opportunities, relative affluence, and political awareness should assure their continued importance in the economic and political arenas.

- Cultural-linguistic and historic ties between ethnic groups could form the basis for regional coalitions. A party drawing support from groups in the northwestern interior and some of the coastal groups could form a government acceptable to the majority of Liberians.
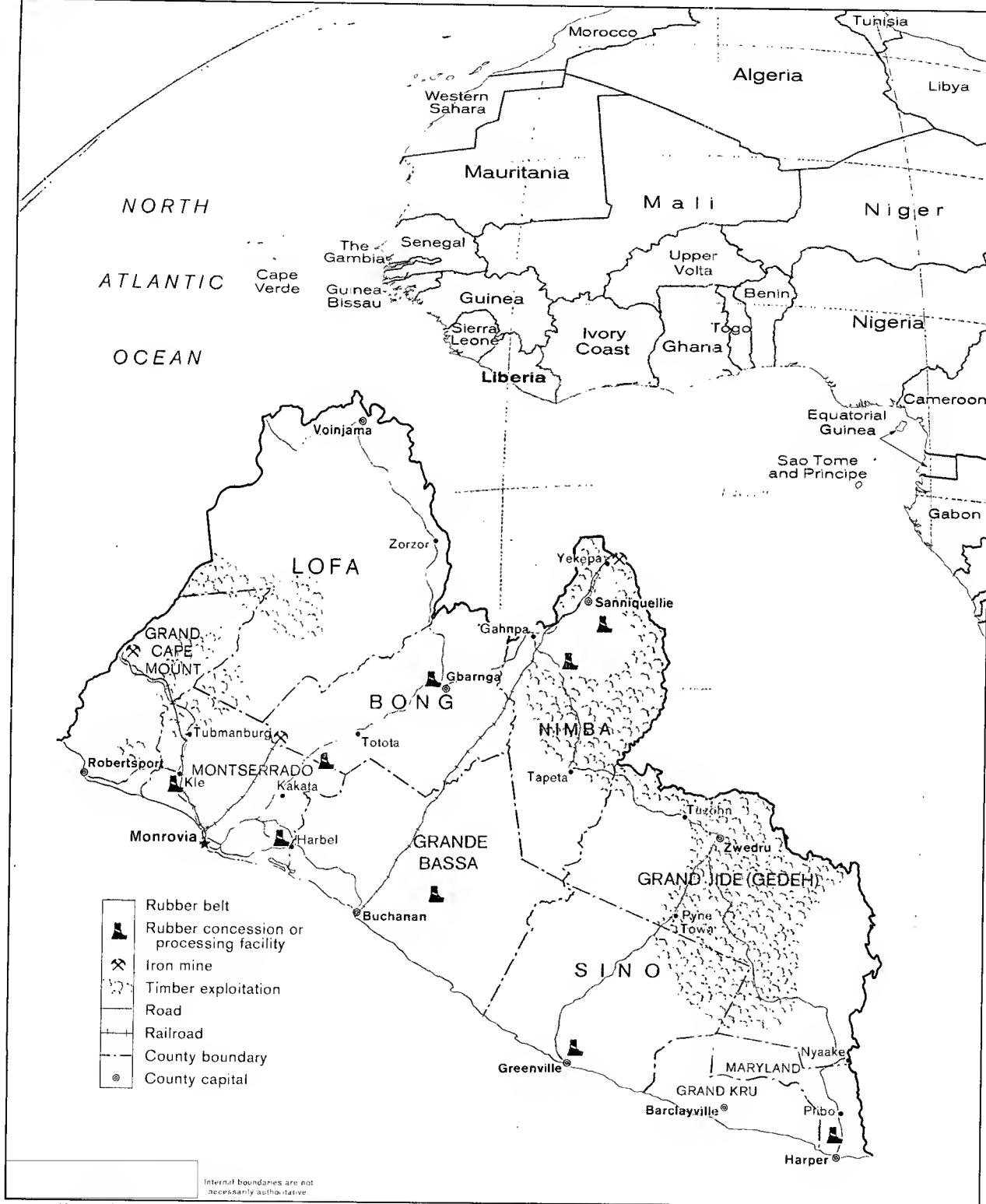
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July 1984

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Economic Activity in Liberia

Legend:
- Rubber belt
- Rubber concession or processing facility
- Iron mine
- Timber exploitation
- Road
- Railroad
- County boundary
- County capital

Internal boundaries are not necessarily authoritative

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Tribalism and Regionalism in West Africa: The Liberian Case

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Introduction: Ethnicity and Regionalism in West Africa

The jury is still out as to whether stable democracies can be established in countries where tribalism is strong. Westernized elements in most of these countries form small elites that dominate the government, control the national economy, and manipulate tribal groups in much the way the former colonial powers did. Even the overthrow of these manipulative governments rarely leads to democracy. Successor governments usually have narrow population bases drawn from particular tribal or regional groups—often those who were previously denied access to power. The result is usually an unstable tribally based dictatorship, factional squabbling, or, if pushed to the extreme, civil war. In this paper we take a broad look at tribalism and regionalism in West Africa and examine in detail the situation in Liberia.

West Africa is a mosaic of more than 400 tribal groups overlaying 16 independent states. Despite progress toward national integration, tribalism and regionalism still have a fundamental influence on political behavior and help shape coups. Although we do not foresee an upheaval on the order of Nigeria's 1967-70 civil war—which cost a half million lives—the dangers of ethnic divisiveness remain. In many countries ethnic factors compound economic inequalities and accentuate racial and religious differences. Throughout the region, allegiances and patron-client relationships tend to follow tribal and broader ethnic lines. Development of social class consciousness in the various West African states has been quite limited. Social and economic mobility are dependent on linkages to political power, which is often concentrated within a particular ethnic group.

Most West African governments have tried to minimize the threats to their stability inherent in ethnic diversity by adopting single-party or military rule, both of which allow centralized control and promote national integration. Since the coup in Nigeria last December, the only remaining multiparty democracies in the region are Senegal and The Gambia. In

some cases, however, seizure of the government by inexperienced and unsophisticated military personnel, as in Ghana and Liberia, has led to interethnic hostilities.

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Neither the Ivory Coast nor Sierra Leone has resolved the issue of presidential succession, and both could experience bitter competition for power among ethnic groups if their leaders become incapacitated before a successor is named. The sudden demise of the heads of state of Benin or Togo also could stir deep-seated ethnic and regional animosities.

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Economic deterioration in countries already faced with large foreign debts presents another set of problems that could undermine existing governments and bring tribal and regional factors into play. The recent coup in Nigeria is an example. The military assumed power to prevent—among other things—continued economic decline, but in the aftermath they abolished a constitution that had provided for a legal balance of ethnic and regional interests. Although it is not clear that economic problems per se are a cause of political instability in the region, economic deterioration, coupled with high-level corruption, has been used as a justification for the majority of coups in West Africa over the past five years. Droughts and food shortages have aggravated conditions. Moreover, social and economic pressures in the poorer states are exacerbated by the new limitations on migration to relatively prosperous Nigeria and Ivory Coast.

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Liberia is an example of a former one-party state where long-established political arrangements have been overthrown and where ethnic and regional factors are assuming new importance. The United States has a strong interest in continued stability in this small African nation. The historic "special relationship" between the United States and Liberia extends beyond defense agreements to important transport access rights and to communications facilities unavailable elsewhere on the continent.

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Historic-Geographic Alignments

Two distinct Liberias—the coastal settlements and the rural interior—have coexisted since early times. Modern political, social, and economic developments have been largely restricted to the coastal region. Administrative and commercial activity became focused on Monrovia where the first settlers, freeborn and emancipated blacks from the United States, established their society and government. Disdainful of agriculture, fearful of the indigenous inhabitants, and unfamiliar with the humid tropical environment, the settlers chose to remain along the coast. Their culture and economic system largely excluded participation by the tribal majority.

The authority of the central government was minimal in the interior prior to World War II. Administrative controls were limited, and they were not accompanied by a spread of "settler" culture, education, or economic development. The tribal peoples retained their traditional communities, with each group preserving its own social, religious, and judicial institutions

Major changes in the practices, which had excluded rural tribals from national life, occurred after World

War II. The economy expanded into the interior, where iron mining supported the development of several modern enclaves, and tribal Liberians—especially from northwestern and central counties—moved increasingly into urban and semiurban wage labor. The social, residential, and occupational mixing that took place increased communal solidarity but also created greater awareness of cultural differences. Many tribals were incorporated into the technocratic levels of the Liberian Government, but few were absorbed into the power structure. 25X1

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During the 1960s, administrative initiatives led to increased tribal representation in the national legislature and brought greater numbers of tribal leaders into the ruling class. Regional self-consciousness was enhanced and many tribal leaders were co-opted into settler politics. But these changes were largely cosmetic. Before the 1980 coup, control of the ruling True Whig Party and of the legislature remained securely in the hands of the traditional settler elite, 25X1
and real power remained concentrated in the executive. 25X1

The Liberian Case: Altered Relationships

In April 1980 an enlisted men's coup led by current Head of State Samuel Doe installed a Krahn-dominated military regime in Liberia and eliminated the top leadership of the Americo-Liberian settler elite. This upset the sociopolitical structures through which control of the country had been maintained for the past century and a half. The coup also removed the Americo-Liberian elite as a unifying focus of tribal Liberian dissatisfaction and opened the way for competition among groups with little experience in power sharing. Ethnic and regional interests, historically subordinated to those of the elite, have now surfaced, and Liberians from the long-neglected rural hinterland are for the first time in a position to participate in national affairs.

Over the past 18 months, the military government has begun a gradual process of return to civilian rule. A draft constitution has been prepared, and a ban on

political activities is supposed to be removed in late July 1984; elections are scheduled for 1985, although that schedule may be altered again as it was earlier this year. The draft constitution proscribes development of parties along ethnic lines, but nonetheless, pre- and post-election politics are likely to reflect the country's basic ethnic and geographic divisions. Tribal and regional tensions have already begun to surface and could strain national unity. If the election process is aborted or if ethnic issues are highlighted in the campaign, tensions along tribal lines could erode the unity of the poorly disciplined military. 25X1

The Americo-Liberians and Their Wards. The core of the Americo-Liberian (settler) population is formed by descendants of freeborn and emancipated blacks from the United States who settled along the coast beginning early in the 19th century. Also included in this 25X1

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group were Africans from captured slave ships, a few immigrants from Barbados, and a limited number of tribal people who were integrated during the next 150 years by means of a "ward" or "apprenticeship" system. The culture that developed promoted solidarity and ensured their dominance. The settlers are estimated to represent about 3 percent of the population.

The settlers are socially and economically stratified. The "inner elite," an interlocking network of families, controlled most political, economic, educational, social, and religious structures. The True Whig Party, the Protestant churches, and the public service were the settlers' principal instruments of domination. It was, however, through the Masonic Lodge—largely impervious to tribal involvement—that the elite families exercised control of these institutions.

Sharing power and wealth with the inner elite was a broader group that included important government officials, doctors, lawyers, and clergymen. On the periphery of this ruling class were the poorer settlers who—along with those indigenous Liberians who had adopted the urban, Christian, English-speaking lifestyle—worked in semiprofessional occupations

During the 1980 coup and its aftermath, visible symbols of settler control were attacked. The Masonic Lodge edifice in Monrovia was destroyed and the organization was banned; many of the elite were killed, or imprisoned, or fled. The solidarity of the settler group, already weakened by the student and leftist opposition movements of the late 1970s, was further eroded. Many of those who had been part of the ruling class and the "civilized" portion of the modern sector managed, however, to maintain positions in the public service and the community. The settlers also retain their self-consciousness as a group. They remain the best educated, most affluent, and most politically aware of Liberia's ethnic groups and will continue to be a factor in the economic and political arenas.

The Tribals. The end of settler rule in 1980 set the stage for greater participation by the country's tribal majority—more than 95 percent of the population—in the political arena. Liberia has 16 major ethnic groups, and none make up the majority necessary to

dominate politics in a multiparty state. The groups fall into three linguistic categories, the Mande-, the Kru-, and the West Atlantic–speaking peoples. A limited cultural commonality exists among West Atlantic– and Mande–speaking groups that could lead to political alliances. Historic and recent interactions between tribal groups and the location of their homelands in relation to foreign economic enclaves are also of political importance.

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The urban coastal/rural interior dichotomy, which characterizes the nation's political and economic life, is also reflected among the tribal groups. Tribals whose native lands are close to urban centers have been the main indigenous participants in "civilized" society. They are generally better educated, more affluent, and healthier than tribals from the interior. The settlers chose administrators for the interior provinces from the coastal tribes; educated members of these groups are more likely to have participated in settler politics. Many from the interior identify coastal groups—who they see as having reached an accommodation with the former rulers—with the settler regime. However, large numbers of tribals from the coastal region, the "bush" (traditional) Bassa, Grebo, and Kru (some of whom are found inland) remained outside the modern sector.
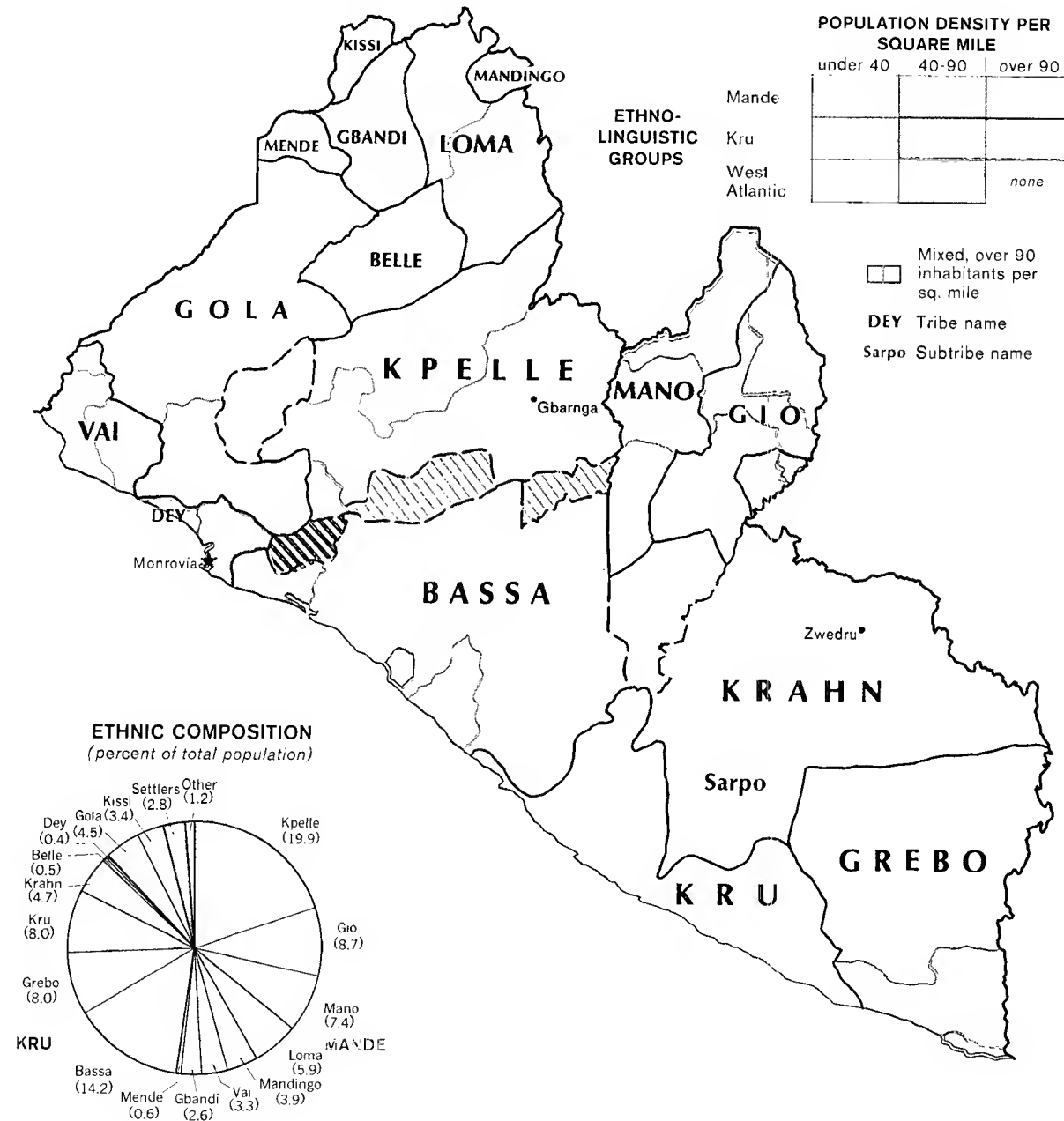
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The tribes of the interior, whose members had little access to power or to economic and educational opportunities under settler rule, are prominent in the current government. The principal interior tribes are the Gio, Kpelle, Krahn, Loma, Mandingo, and Mano. Mostly subsistence farmers, their traditional pattern of life changed after World War II when iron mines and roads drew many into the modern economic sector. The military was held in low esteem by the settlers but provided an important means of upward mobility for members of tribal groups. Prior to the coup the enlisted ranks were made up largely of Loma and Kpelle from the northwest.

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Among the native institutions that remain potentially politically significant is the Poro, an all-male secret society with political, judicial, religious, and educational functions. It is widespread among the Mande- and West Atlantic–speaking groups in northern Liberia and still takes precedence in many rural areas over

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Population Density and Ethnic Composition of Liberia

ETHNO-
LINGUISTIC
GROUPS

POPULATION DENSITY PER SQUARE MILE

	under 40	40-90	over 90
Mande			
Kru			
West Atlantic			none

Mixed, over 90 inhabitants per sq. mile

DEY Tribe name

Sarpo Subtribe name

ETHNIC COMPOSITION
(percent of total population)

Kpelle (19.9)
Gio (8.7)
Mano (7.4)
Loma (5.9)
Mandingo (3.9)
Vai (3.3)
Gbandi (2.6)
Mende (0.6)
Bassa (14.2)
Grebo (8.0)
Kru (8.0)
Krahn (4.7)
Belle (0.5)
Dey (0.4)
Gola (4.5)
Kissi (2.8)
Settlers (2.8)
Other (1.2)

KRU
MANDE

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other associations within the community. Most groups in Liberia have secret societies, but no other secret society is transtribal or affects tribal life as thoroughly as the Poro. It could act as a unifying mechanism—transcending tribal bonds—among groups where it is important. This unifying potential was appreciated during the Tubman presidency; the Poro was recognized by law, and the President became its nominal head. Head of State Doe, his Krahn tribe, and the related Kru tribe, now prominent in the military government and officers corps, do not belong to the Poro. Thus, they lack a politically important link to the many Liberians who are members of the society.

A large majority of the tribal peoples (more than 95 percent of the country's total population) follow traditional African religions, and traditional practices remain strong even among those who claim adherence to Islam or Christianity. Islam, which is in an expansionary phase, accounts for more followers among the indigenous population than does Christianity. Muslims, making up about 20 percent of the total population, are found in the north, especially in Grand Cape Mount and Lofa Counties but also in Bong, Nimba, Bomi, and Montserrado. Christianity, on the other hand, has spread along the coast in the areas where the settlers are concentrated. Christian missionaries have had only limited success in the central and southeastern interior, and Christians are estimated to constitute no more than 10 percent of the total population. Liberia under settler rule was a nominally Christian state. With the growing number of Muslims in the population and the enhanced position of tribals, however, Islam probably will assume a somewhat more important role in national life. The Muslim community is still relatively conservative.

Throughout rural Liberia tribal institutions continue to dominate daily affairs, and local leaders maintain order by consensus. Since the 1960s tribal chiefs and elders have actively participated in national politics, and Head of State Doe has on several occasions sought their counsel. These leaders are likely to play an increasingly important role, especially in rural areas, when the ban on political activity is removed.

Cultural-linguistic and historic ties between ethnic groups could provide an organizational basis for political activity. Coalitions along regional lines are possible in the northwest interior, the central interior, the southeast interior, and in the coastal areas. Politically significant coalitions are least likely to occur in the southeast where an autonomous achievement-oriented tribal structure prevails.

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Growing Importance of Ethnic and Regional Factors

The political significance of ethnicity prior to the 1980 coup was very limited because it was held in check by the settlers' monopoly of power. Student activism represented one of the few expressions of political vitality, and this followed the coastal/interior dichotomy. The leading opposition party, the Progressive People's Party (PPP), was urban based and apparently transethnic. However, the rapidity with which ethnically based tensions arose following the coup and the events surrounding recent coup plotting indicate that tribal affiliation, especially among less sophisticated Liberians, has remained an important influence.

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Doe, upon seizing power, attempted to reduce intertribal problems by including representatives of Liberia's main ethnic groups in the People's Redemption Council (PRC) and Cabinet, by banning political activity, and by antitribal pronouncements. However, US Embassy analysis indicates that, despite the suppression of open expression of ethnic enmities, tensions exist below the surface, primarily in reaction to the growing dominance of Doe's Krahn tribe. US defense attache reporting also reflects the increasing awareness of ethnicity in Liberian society over the past year. In particular, it points up the growing resentment among other tribal groups of the Krahn influence in the military and in the affairs of state. A so-called Nimba County conspiracy last November, involving prominent Mano and Gio, served to highlight these sensitivities.

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Since the 1980 coup, the PRC and the Liberian Army have been the most visible elements of tribal society in

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Possible Regional Coalitions

Coastal Liberia
Most of the country's urban educated people live in settlements at river mouths along the coastal plain. A coalition of groups from these settlements and their environs—the settlers, the Vai, the Bassa, and the urban Kru and Grebo—could be formed. Historic ties between some coastal groups and tribes in the north-western interior could provide a basis for a larger coalition. A party drawing support from both regions could minimize ethnic friction and lead to the election of a central government acceptable to the majority of Liberians.

The Northwestern Interior
Tribal groups in the flat-to-hilly northwestern portion of the country have cultural-linguistic affinities reinforced in some cases by Islamic ties and by the Poro secret society. A coalition of peoples from this region would be politically significant. The Kpelle, Loma, Kissi, Gbandi, and Gola also are well represented in heavily urbanized Montserrado County. Members of these groups—especially the Kpelle and the Loma—are well represented among the enlisted ranks.

The Central Interior
In Nimba County, where rolling plains give way to hills and mountains near the eastern border, iron mining, timber operations, and commercial agriculture provide a basis for relative economic prosperity.

A regional self-consciousness seems to be emerging the Mano and Gio tribes of the area, who are reported to have a strong group identity and a well-developed political consciousness. Cultural-linguistic affinities exist between the Mano and Gio and fellow Mande speakers to the northwest. Mano and Gio have reportedly joined the military in increasing numbers since the 1980 coup.

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The Southeastern Interior
The sparsely populated, heavily forested southern interior is the home of the Krahn, the Sarpo, and the "bush" Kru and Grebo. The potential political power of these relatively autonomous groups is limited both by sparse population and tribal structure, but anti-Krahn/Kru feelings among other Liberians—who perceive the eastern Kru speakers as a group—could promote a coalition among the Kru, Krahn, and Grebo. Identification of Krahn and Kru with the Doe government could work to their disadvantage during the election campaign or in a civilian government dominated by members of groups from the north. The prominence of the Kru and Krahn among the rank and file and in the officers' corps, which has grown since the coup, has become an irritant to relations between groups.

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Liberia. Their practices—including those of Doe himself—have focused attention on ethnic divisions:

- Head of State Doe, as Chairman of the PRC, has surrounded himself with fellow Krahn tribesmen—a policy that has engendered considerable anti-Krahn sentiment.

- Lesser PRC members have also promoted the appointments of unqualified fellow tribesmen to government positions and interfered in disputes on behalf of ethnic compatriots with some regularity.

- In several cases of coup plotting by officers and enlisted men, the unifying element among plotters has been common tribal affiliation or historic affinities between groups such as the Mano and Gio.

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The Liberian Army is composed mainly of tribal peoples from the interior of the country. The core of the Army is not a self-conscious professional force, but a disparate group of semiliterate tribals who see
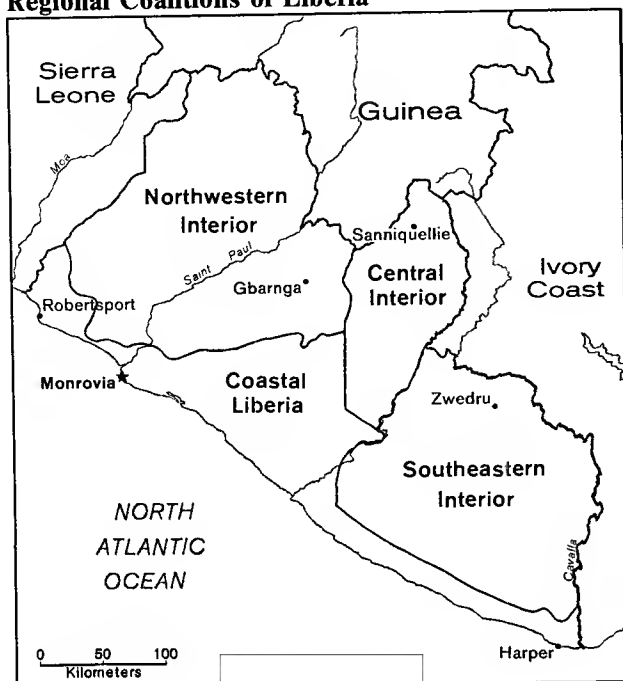
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Regional Coalitions of Liberia

Sierra Leone

Guinea

Northwestern Interior

Sanniquellie

Saint Paul

Roberts port

Gbarnga

Central Interior

Ivory Coast

Monrovia

Coastal Liberia

Zwedru

NORTH ATLANTIC OCEAN

Southeastern Interior

0 50 100
Kilometers

Harper

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generally ethnically heterogeneous, but the loyalties of members of the units to their commanding officers vary. The Executive Mansion Guard, which according to the US Army attache is the only ground unit in the Monrovia area with both functioning weapons and ammunition, is heavily Krahn. This unit could be expected to engage any group attempting to overthrow the Doe government, although its ability to respond to a threat is uncertain. Recent overt grumbling within the unit over poor living and working conditions, however, could increase Doe's vulnerability to an attempt to remove him. 25X1

The military government has announced plans to relinquish power to a civilian government in January 1986. Preparations for elections, including the registration of voters, are continuing, although progress is uneven and the government's commitment to free and fair elections remains in doubt. The US Embassy believes Head of State Doe now wants to remain in power beyond 1986 and to become civilian president. In our judgment, Doe is not above rigging the elections or delaying the timetable for civilian rule indefinitely if it looks as if he cannot control the transition process. 25X1

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military service primarily as a means of providing for their families. They place greater importance on clan, tribal, and village interests than on national institutions. Although no current ethnic breakdown of the 5,000- to 6,000-man Army is available, Loma and Kpelle reportedly accounted for 60 and 15 percent of the enlisted men, respectively, prior to the 1980 coup; their dominance has been diluted by increasing numbers of Mano, Gio, and particularly Krahn recruits in the postcoup era. Kru-speaking groups, especially the Kru and the Krahn, are disproportionately represented in the officer corps, and since the 1980 coup they have gained an even larger share of the higher ranks.

Should the unity of the poorly disciplined Army be undermined in the coming months, factionalization could follow ethnic lines. The most likely alliances among troops would be: between Loma and Kpelle tribes, who probably still make up the majority of enlisted personnel; between Mano and Gio tribals from Nimba County; or possibly between Kru, Sapo (half Krahn), and Krahn. The Army's units are

Even if the main contestants for presidential and legislative office are educated Liberians, they will need a constituency outside urban areas and will most likely draw support from particular ethnic or regional groups. If candidates appeal to regional and ethnic interests, uneducated rural Liberians as well as unassimilated tribal Liberians in the urban areas probably will be attracted to them. Most observers agree that only a "tribal" can be elected president at this time; however, the majority of the candidates are likely to 25X1 be members of the educated class with partial or full tribal heritage who have adopted "elite" culture.

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Prospects
According to US Embassy reporting, the requirements for registration of political parties are so minimal that, when and if the ban on political activity is lifted, a very large number of parties could spring forth to test their strength. The current ban and the

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Monrovia

Monrovia, the capital and largest city, has been at the center of Liberia's commercial, social, and political life since the founding of the first republic. The metropolitan area has a population in excess of 250,000. Its inhabitants are ethnically heterogeneous and broadly representative of the country's various ethnic groups, but include sizable concentrations of settlers and of certain coastal and Lofa County groups. Residential patterns increasingly reflect socioeconomic status rather than ethnic background, although a number of ethnic neighborhoods still exist.

Rural Liberians contribute significantly to the city's rapid growth. They are attracted by urban amenities but find high rates of unemployment and crime and housing shortages. The World Bank estimates that as many as 70 percent of the metropolitan area's population falls below the poverty line.

Expatriate Lebanese and Indian firms are the backbone of the city's commercial and manufacturing life. Their dominance in these fields, especially their control of import activities, makes them a focus for resentment. Under the proposed constitution, these groups will be forbidden Liberian citizenship because of their race.

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absence of a tradition of multiparty democracy make it impossible to determine at this time what parties might emerge or to which tribal groups they are likely to turn for support. Prior to the 1980 coup, the only party with a national organization was the ruling True Whig Party. Although the reappearance of this party is unlikely, politicians with tribal backgrounds and former ties to the True Whig Party may attempt to revitalize networks in the tribal interior. Other precoup organizations likely to participate in the elections include the former People's Progressive Party and the Movement for Justice in Africa (MOJA). These groups were based mainly in and around Monrovia but had made limited attempts to broaden their base of support in the interior.

The growing probability that Head of State Doe will openly run for the presidency increases the potential for tribally based opposition. There have been indications over the past year that his candidacy will be opposed in Lofa, Nimba, and perhaps Kru counties. The chances for instability in the medium term are likely to increase if potential presidential contestants are intimidated by a Doe candidacy and refuse to participate in the elections. Groups opposed to the prospect of continued Krahn dominance and/or military influence are unlikely to support a Doe government.

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US Embassy reporting indicates that discontent among tribally based elements is increasing, but we expect no imminent outbreak of hostilities. However, should the process of return to civilian rule continue, we expect that as the election nears economic deterioration and distrust of Doe's intentions are likely to increase the potential for tensions along ethnic and regional lines. A campaign arousing ethnic divisiveness could erode the fragile ties uniting the poorly disciplined military, and, if it fanned anti-Krahn hostilities or was dominated by personalities from a particular group or region, it could threaten the return to civilian rule.

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Changes effected by the 1980 "revolution" make it unlikely that a freely elected government would be able to institutionalize regional or ethnic discrimination as did the settler regime. Unless an able executive and a strong central government representative of the majority of society is elected, however, Liberia is likely to experience a turbulent period in which the various tribal and regional interests will struggle for dominance.

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Appendix

Politically Significant Ethnic Groups

	Percent of Population	Ethno-Linguistic Base	Poro Group	Geographic Distribution	Historic Position	Current Role
America-Liberian	3		No	Coastal settlements, especially Monrovia.	Dominated the country's social, political, and economic life for more than a century until 1980.	The role and influence of the group have been modified but not eclipsed. Several important positions in the current government are held by members of the group, and many with strong ties to the group participated in the drafting and review of the new Constitution.
Coastal						
Bassa	14	Kru	No	Coastal areas, especially Grand Bassa, Montserrado Counties, and Rivercess Territory.	Despite their proximity to the coastal settlements, few were assimilated into settler culture, and Bassa are rare in civilized society. The majority were administered under a system of indirect rule until after World War II.	They make up a significant portion of the wage labor force in Monrovia and surrounding plantations. They have exerted little influence on the national level. There are no Bassa serving in the Cabinet or in the PRC.
Grebo	8	Kru	No	Southern Counties—Grand Jide (Gedeh) and Maryland.	Despite sporadic resistence to the settlers, many were assimilated into settler culture, serving as teachers and ministers by the early 20th century and later on as middle- and high-ranking government officials.	There are currently some Grebo serving on both the PRC and in the Cabinet.
Kru	8	Kru	No	Coastal areas, especially Sino, Grand Kru, and Montserrado Counties.	Like members of the other coastal groups, some were assimilated and several held high-level positions in the settler government. They were well represented in the precoup officer corps—especially in the Coast Guard.	They have played an important role in the military government. They hold a large portion of the Cabinet and PRC positions allotted to coastal groups.

Politically Significant Ethnic Groups (continued)

	Percent of Population	Ethno-Linguistic Base	Poro Group	Geographic Distribution	Historic Position	Current Role
Vai	3	Mande-Northern	Yes	Grand Cape Mount and Montserrado County.	This largely Muslim group came in early contact with the settlers, forming an aristocratic relationship with settler leaders, marrying into their families, and taking part in their economic, social, and political life. Prominent Vai, who adopted Christianity, were among the few indigenous folk who held positions in the Masonic Lodge.	Vai participation in the military government has been limited.
Interior						
Gio	9	Mande-Eastern	Yes	Heavily concentrated in Nimba County.	They are closely related to the Mano and are reported to have a strong group identity and a well-developed political consciousness.	The group is represented in the PRC and the Cabinet. US defense attache reporting indicates increasing tensions between members of the Gio and related Mano groups and the Krahn. Both Mano and Gio were heavily involved in the November 1983 Nimba County coup plot. Dismissed head of the Army Thomas Quiwonkpa is a Gio.
Kpelle	20	Mande-Western	Yes	Throughout western Liberia, but especially in Bong, Lofa, and Montserrado Counties.	Although they represent a significant portion of Liberia's wage labor force—especially on the rubber plantations—they were largely absent from the central government prior to the coup.	The Kpelle are now represented on the PRC and in the Cabinet, but were not part of the original PRC. They were included in an effort to defuse intertribal tensions.

Politically Significant Ethnic Groups (continued)

	Percent of Population	Ethno-Linguistic Base	Poro Group	Geographic Distribution	Historic Position	Current Role
Krahn	5	Kru	No	Mainly Grand Gedeh and Sino Counties.	The Tchien, Putu, and Sapo are names sometimes given different elements of the Krahn group who have only recently been recognized as an ethnic group. Internal divisions within the group, in particular between the Krahn and Sapo, continue to cause problems. The group was among the most obscure prior to the coup.	They are heavily represented on the PRC and in the higher echelons of the military. They dominate the Executive Mansion Guard and key positions in units stationed in or near the capital. There are a number of Krahn in the Cabinet as well. Head of State Doe is the country's leading Krahn. Clannish and mistrustful of others; visibility in the government has exacerbated their previous negative image.
Loma	6	Mande-Western	Yes	Majority in Lofa County, significant numbers in Montserrado.	Most of the people are farmers. They made up the majority of the enlisted ranks prior to the coup and were heavily represented in the late President's Executive Guard.	They hold positions on the PRC, Cabinet, and in the military. The recent naming of Loma to top-ranking positions in the PRC and Army may have been calculated to eliminate growing discontent among the group. Loma were involved with the settlers in the first plot against the current regime.
Mandingo	4	Mande-Northern	No	A concentration in Lofa County near Voinjama, but found throughout the country.	This largely Muslim group of itinerant traders played an important role in commerce, especially in the interior. They resisted assimilation into the elite group and were rarely absorbed into communities.	Supplemented by significant numbers of fellow tribesmen from neighboring Guinea, this aggressive group is active in the diamond and gold trade and in most facets of the country's transport sector. The Mandingo are unpopular with other groups, but, if they decide to become politically active, their relative economic strength may allow them to exert some influence.
Mano	7	Mande-Eastern	Yes	Heavily concentrated in Nimba County.	Isolated from Liberian political and economic development prior to World War II, the development of Lamco Iron Mine at Yekepa and associated transport infrastructure brought an increased number of the group into the modern sector.	Mano have reportedly increased their representation in the military since 1980. There are currently two Mano serving on the PRC. Mano were involved in the recent coup plot.

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